

ON HAVING WHITENESS

Whiteness is a condition one first acquires and then one *has*—a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which “white” people have a particular susceptibility. The condition is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one’s body, in one’s mind, and in one’s world. Parasitic Whiteness renders its hosts’ appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target nonwhite peoples. Once established, these appetites are nearly impossible to eliminate. Effective treatment consists of a combination of psychic and social-historical interventions. Such interventions can reasonably aim only to reshape Whiteness’s infiltrated appetites—to reduce their intensity, redistribute their aims, and occasionally turn those aims toward the work of reparation. When remembered and represented, the ravages wreaked by the chronic condition can function either as warning (“never again”) or as temptation (“great again”). Memorialization alone, therefore, is no guarantee against regression. There is not yet a permanent cure.

Keywords: racism, envy, groups, aggression

This is not a traditionally organized psychoanalytic text. No clear path links my argument to that of my predecessors. This formal peculiarity might be the product of my effort to braid together two incompatible voices, to write simultaneously from both inside and outside the affliction I mean to study. Each position—inside and outside—offers an irreducibly distorted view: the one by the limits of sincere introspection, the other by the limits of theorized observation. The two perspectives turbulently converged during a recent experience in South Africa. We dropped off a Black woman hitchhiker at her ramshackle township home, one of hundreds we

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Submission for publication March 16, 2020.

could see, all jammed together helter-skelter on a barren, cut-off, underserved piece of land—apartheid segregation still firmly in place. Back at the hotel, we spoke to one of the staff about how troubled we’d been by what we had seen. The young woman responded without hesitation. Well, she said, it’s really simple: they have their houses; we have ours. She spoke with a serene confidence, pulling us in, indifferent to whatever resistance we, in our silence, might have felt. “They have their houses; we have ours.” That sentence, and especially that word, “we”—repellant and implicating—inspires, haunts, and deforms what follows.

I will focus on Whiteness as a condition one first acquires and then *has*—a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which “white” people have a particular susceptibility. The condition is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one’s body, in one’s mind, and in one’s world. Parasitic Whiteness renders its hosts’ appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target nonwhite peoples. Once established, these appetites are nearly impossible to eliminate. Effective treatment consists of a combination of psychic and social-historical interventions. Such interventions can reasonably aim only to reshape Whiteness’s infiltrated appetites—to reduce their intensities, redistribute their aims, and occasionally turn those aims toward the work of reparation. When remembered and represented, the ravages wreaked by the chronic condition can function either as warning (“never again”) or as temptation (“great again”). Memorialization alone, therefore, is no guarantee against regression. There is not yet a permanent cure.

WHITENESS AS A WAY OF BEING AND A WAY OF KNOWING

In what follows, I will capitalize Whiteness to signify Parasitic Whiteness—an acquired multidimensional condition: (1) a way of being, (2) a mode of identity, (3) a way of knowing and sorting the objects constituting one’s human surround. Whiteness should not be confused with lowercase *whiteness*, a commonly used signifier of racial identity.

Parasitic Whiteness infiltrates our drives early on. The infiltrated drive binds id-ego-superego into a singular entity, empowered to dismiss and override all forms of resistance. The drive apparatus of Whiteness

divides the object world into two distinct zones. In one, the Whiteness-infiltrated drive works in familiar ways—inhibited, checked, distorted, transformed—susceptible, that is, to standard neurotic deformations. In the other, however, none of this holds true. There the liberated drive goes rogue, unchecked and unlimited, inhibited by neither the protests of its objects nor the counterforces of its internal structures.

Any infant is vulnerable to the parasite of Whiteness. The extent of the infant's vulnerability depends on how the infant is mapped, how it is positioned, where it is placed. All infants orient themselves in relation to a first, initial, mapping line. On this side of the line will live its familiars, us—while on that side will live its strangers, them. For every infant, this mapping line founds, delineates, and defines the place of the “stranger.” As such, it marks the site of the first organized and enduring representation of an external source of anxiety. Beginning with the onset of stranger anxiety, the infant, while working to find its place in the world, will perpetually aim for safety, avoiding, as best it can, any external object located on the dangerous/stranger side of the line. Parasitic Whiteness works to turn this foundational line into an impermeable wall, to permanently fix the place of the nonwhite stranger on the far side of the wall, there to be sorted and categorized, and eventually mastered.

Our merely unruly sexualities may exert a constant pressure to eroticize the bodies and beings of strangers, transgressively aiming to defy the wall, to integrate those bodies and beings, to take them in. But the rogue sexualities of Parasitic Whiteness add to that. They negatively eroticize nonwhite bodies and beings. These objects, now marked, are wanted still, but wanted not to be taken in but simply to be taken, not to be loved but to be hated. Holding these objects in place, inflicting pain on them—this sadism becomes the exquisite and economical solution to any apparent conflict between wanting and hating. Parasitic Whiteness further demeans its nonwhite bodies and beings by way of a naturalizing system of naming and classification. Once it has mapped and transformed its nonwhite objects into such a fixed taxonomical category, the rogue sexuality of Parasitic Whiteness can expand its aim. It permanently maps them as external/away, and from there, wherever that is, these objects are available for limitless use—limitless labor, of limitless kind.

Parasitic Whiteness generates a state of constantly erotized excitement, a drift toward frenzy.¹ Fix, control, and arouse; want, hate, and terrorize. Whiteness resides at this always volatile edge, in a state of permanent skirmish, always taking on the never obliterated resistances of its nonwhite objects. Opaque to itself and hyperconscious of those objects, Whiteness pursues the impossible, a stable synthesis, an end point. It can therefore never rest. Blindly, then, it continues forward, unendingly bent on conquering. There seems no backward path, no mode of retreat. It faces an interminable forward march. If only it could totally and permanently transform these objects, turn the once feared and unknown into the now reduced and measured; turn the once unique and overwhelming into the now fungible and owned.

Whiteness originates not in innocence but in entitlement.

“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

Whiteness, taking this injunction as its own, transforms it into an *epistemology of entitled dominion*, a mode of coming-to-know in which identity and entitlement are fused. We are licensed at birth, and therefore entitled, to find, capture, dissect, and overpower our targeted objects. As such, we will finally come to know and take dominion over them. Within the terms of the epistemology of entitled dominion knowledge becomes both a sign of superiority and an instrument of power. The steps from knowledge to dominion are clear. The more We know, then, the more We can do; the more We can do, the more We can control; the more We can

¹Here is that frenzy revealed, a grounding frenzy whose resonances, though often much muted, continue to be communicated via Parasitic Whiteness: “An Anglican missionary observed that the first toy given to white children in Jamaica was often a whip; the overseer Thomas Thistlewood, who managed forty-two slaves in St. Elizabeth Parish, kept a horrifying diary that describes how, in a single year, he whipped three-quarters of the men and raped half the women. When he moved to a different plantation, he threatened to dismember the enslaved men and women under his care, devising tortures and humiliations that included forcing some to defecate into other slaves’ mouths and urinate in others’ eyes, rubbing lime juice in their wounds after floggings, and covering a whipped, bound man in molasses while leaving him for the flies and mosquitoes” (Cep 2020).

control, the more We can dominate; and finally, the more We can dominate, the more We are realizing our divine mandate to “have dominion . . . over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” Triumphant submitting to this mandate, Whiteness pursues a utopia of permanent satisfaction and assigns to nonwhite peoples the task of being its ideal, infinitely need-satisfying object, there to service its voracious, and uncheckable, appetites.

WHITENESS IN ACTION: INSIDE AND OUT

When targeting individuals, Whiteness opportunistically attaches to any psychic structure that maps self and object vertically. These vertical planes are ubiquitous and as such provide an abundance of potential host receptors for Parasitic Whiteness. Six separate, yet intersecting, such planes should be kept in mind here. (1) The ego’s foundation in a vertical split—pleasure inside, pain outside; good subject here, bad object there. The original object, then, is the bad object, the demeaned one, below and threatening, of whom Freud writes: “the ego hates, abhors and pursues with intent to destroy” (1915, p. 138). (2) The subject-object world of the paranoid/schizoid position. The emerging subject here is in constant struggle to maintain itself against threats emerging from bad objects, to withstand them, and, finally, to fix and locate them elsewhere enough, below enough, to settle in, to keep going.² (3) The subject-object world of narcissism, of grandiosity and diminishment, of the Master and the Slave, of the all and the nothing, the highest and the lowest. (4) The subject-object world of perversion: of the user and the used, the person and the thing, the whole and the part, the owner and the owned, the dominator and the dominated. (5) The subject-object world of the oedipal triangle: of higher and lower, of power and powerlessness, of having and not having,

²Here is a clear and representative Kleinian conceptualization of the vertical plane: “disillusionment opens up a gap between the self and the object; a gap that to start with, is filled by Chaos, leading to panicky feelings of falling into a terrifying unknown. Normally the mother’s love saves the day, since it creates a link and is felt to rescue the baby from the abyss. But if this fails and the pain, humiliation, and fear are unbearable, the ‘horizontal’ gap between self and breast becomes a ‘vertical’ gap, with only two positions, triumph or humiliation. The longing for love is then replaced by a longing for power. The patient inhabits an up and down universe in which strength fueled by hatred is idealized and love is seen as weak and contemptible. The patient is seduced by the belief that to become ‘Big’ via massive Projective Identification with the Idealized Bad Object takes seconds, while growing up, is always partial, insecure and takes time and hard work” (Ignêz Sodré, personal communication).

of being able to and not being able to, of satisfaction and despair. (6) The subject-object world of the authoritarian superego. Listen to this representative example: “I was a decent person with her, with my dog Cleo. I was never sadder than when she died. . . . Stupid, fucking stupid. Shut up. Why’d I say that? Just blabbing. Get to work. What’s a fucking dog got to do with anything? You fat piece of shit.” The interior verticality is obvious, the severity, the top-down conviction, the malign domineering—the tyrannical accuser, the cowering accused.

Along each of these vertical planes, subject-object relations are defined by power and grounded in the fantasy of sovereignty. And along each of these vertical planes, safety, satisfaction, and pleasure are necessarily fragile and contingent. Everything I have, everything I am, can be lost: my strength turned to abjection, my inclusion to exile, my calm to terror.

This vertical fragility makes us all susceptible to Parasitic Whiteness. Whiteness promises to turn anxious singularity into confident plurality; isolated frailty into collective might. Whiteness caresses its hosts with reassurances; never again, it can seem to murmur, will you have to be alone. An always strained and always jeopardized “I am” will necessarily be susceptible to this preformed dream of an always empowered “We are.”

But of course Whiteness does not limit its opportunistic work to individuals. It easily infiltrates even groups founded on the protection of individuals, on democratic principles, on a systemic concern for fragile singularities. But when this group contacts an ominous vertical plane, when, for example, it feels jeopardized by external or internal threat, its founding horizontal principles can suddenly seem naive and dangerous. Opportunistic Whiteness, then, can provide an instantaneous alternative, readily transforming the group’s democratic impulses into nativistic ones. As with susceptible individuals, all Parasitic Whiteness needs from its susceptible pluralities is a disruptive collision with verticality, a threat from “below.” We can sense one such “threat” across the world now—refugees in need, demanding a place, and disrupting democratic assumptions of inclusiveness. Whiteness is always ready to respond to such a threat, to answer the call. Once installed, its epistemology of entitled dominion will license its host—individual or group—to power without limit, force without restriction, violence without mercy. Whiteness now enjoys the liberty to freely enact its foundational epistemology of entitled dominion. Entitled dominion not only defines its objects—we can “see” them gathering at our Southern border—it also sets up the frame inside of

which all definition is possible. Anything outside the frame is, by virtue of its outsidedness, both unreal and impossible. The voice of Whiteness's entitled dominion, inside or out, is firm and final: You are not a people; you are labor. You are not a person; you are a deviant. This is not desire; this is sickness. You are not in need; you are a failure. You are not your own; you are ours.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The infiltration of Whiteness can begin modestly.

For two years, when we were three and four, Bobby was my best friend. Bobby had a speech impediment due to a severe cleft palate. I was the only kid on the block who could understand him when he spoke. I loved Bobby. When school started, though, I went to a regular school while Bobby was sent to one for disabled kids. That was the end of the friendship. We never spoke again.

I wanted no part of him now. Something was wrong, weak, and deficient about him. I wanted only to be with kids of my kind. Bobby was now part of Nature, part of what I would learn about. He was no longer, like me, one of those who would do the learning. No one told me to respond this way. No one told me not to. I had had what amounted to a revelation. I simply shunned him, turned away. That shunning, that act of mapping him now as an object, no longer a subject like me—this marked the site where Whiteness might begin its work.

I had drawn a line, established a premise. Whiteness could then opportunistically inaugurate a stepwise expansion of this premise, proceeding as though it were my ally. Together, we then sought and found more markers of deficiency, until finally we arrived at color. Color offers Whiteness, now firmly housed, an apparently limitless, instantly available, field for expansion—providential and clear—an opportunity to realize itself, to arrive at its adult, fully developed, form. Color provides a universe of suitable objects, placed there like gifts, to be captured and crushed, all at a whim, like, for so many Gullivered children, ants are there to be crushed underfoot, butterflies to be locked in a jar. These crushed ants and suffocated butterflies—victims of a nearly cellular narcissism—offer Whiteness a platform on which to begin. Once begun, the rest can seem like simple common sense, the preservation of the host's proper place—somewhere near the apex—within the only proper

and permanent Order of Things. But first, before arriving at its fully developed form, Whiteness has to begin—and for this, nearly anything—even a little boy's cleft palate—will do.

Whiteness began its work only after I had done mine. I had loved Bobby. I was a lonely kid and he was the best thing I had. I was unprepared to lose him; in fact, not only unprepared, but, in retrospect, unable. My fear, my sadness, my loss—Bobby and I would no longer be together—had been erased by my mapping revelation: his wound confirming my intactness. This seemed fair exchange for losing a friend. I was grateful to have escaped from an unbearable loss. The fragile attachment of love and friendship had been transformed into the robust attachments of hatred and revulsion.

All Whiteness needs for a receptor site is an original act of vertical mapping. Whiteness begins with this verticality. It then infiltrates you. You can feel it. It's like getting high: a new reality, an enhanced stature, a special community. You can breathe easier, feel protected and watched over. And then you can look down, below you, and you can see the others, others like Bobby, and they seem to be drifting ever further downward, toward some bottom. And unlike you, they appear helpless and unprotected. They fade into the distance, further and further away, over there, permanently other now, permanently elsewhere. Parasitical Whiteness, in fact, functions as inherited property does. You have received your due. You simply claim what you suddenly realize is yours for the claiming. (See "Whiteness as Property" [Harris 1993].) But with this claiming comes a fear of a crash, of losing everything, of having it taken away. So Parasitic Whiteness, bent first on dominion, now bends toward aversive and then violent defense. Defense now a permanent necessity, safety turns into anxiety, freedom into paranoia, escape into entrapment. Parasitic Whiteness, promising health, delivers sickness.

I shunned the neighborhood's blind peddler; my beloved Aunt Bell suddenly became too fat; J.T., the man who taught me how to drink out of a Coke bottle, turned into the Black guy whose bottles I ought to avoid; my immigrant grandparents became stupid peasants. But these were merely personal relationships, each one weighed down with meanings and histories, weighed down, in fact, by love. But once these fraught transformations were in place, once I was willing to accept them, there emerged the easiest and most global transformation of all. As though I were simply learning to name a natural feature of my new surround,

“Negroes” had now become “Schvartzes.” And with that, I was now mapped in the real world. I was no longer merely white; I was White. I had property and properties. And with this last malign turn, this turn away from mere locality and toward a place in the natural world, Parasitic Whiteness had firmly established its place in a compliant host.

I knew the whole thing was a betrayal. Whiteness regularly leaves a little space like this for consciousness and memory, for the awareness of one’s own treachery. Whiteness maps this awareness, though, this residue of an original innocence, as yet another object to dominate: an interior disability, and as such, a threat to the whole enterprise—weak, sniveling, regretful—that must itself be kept ordered, maintained, and hidden, in effect sent away to an interior “school” where it too—this sliver of conscience—is mapped as a sub-apex object.

All of this came in the form of a terrible flash, more revelation than thought. Bobby and the blind man belonged with those others, in that “school,” somewhere both far away and barren. Parasitical Whiteness works this way—by opening up and mapping a faraway territory—easy to populate, easy to mine, and easy to diminish—a territory capacious enough to hold all the creatures of the earth, while promising its hosts that only they, intoxicated by real privilege and imaginary wholeness, will maintain both the power and the right to remain safe and secure, right where they are.

A ghost of Bobby seems to have come back to me, in the person of a current patient of mine, also born with a speech impediment. As I listen to him, I can see and hear Bobby, his tiny head, his nasal twang, not quite forgiving, but simply welcoming, no matter how long it’s taken for me to get there, over to his side of the line, or, in what amounts to the same identificatory thing, to bring him over to mine. Not realizing the gift he’s giving to me, my patient treats me like an intimate.

“I could disappear,” he says, “and no one would notice. I remember in kindergarten, I was taken out of class and walked down the hall to a very small room. Dark. Four of us. All of us with impediments. It wasn’t the impediment, really, but the method of dealing with it. They took me away. I deserved less than others. Getting pulled out of class. Defining. It locates me in a deficient category. That feeling has never gone away. Must have been countless other moments. I tried to speak and they had no idea what I was saying. Was I at fault? Must have felt I was doing something wrong. I remember walking into the house with my dad. I was five.

He was trying to get me to say ‘key’ and I kept saying ‘kay.’ Back and forth—‘key,’ ‘kay’—seems like ten or twenty times. He couldn’t stand me as I was. Somehow, I was doing something to wrong him. He was so dead set on me saying ‘key.’ I couldn’t do it. It was somehow my fault. Very powerful emotion. Leave me behind; I’m not worth waiting for. Now that I’ve thought of that memory, the feeling that ‘you’re just worth abandoning’ is really powerful. I’m just something worth putting up with, nothing more.”

“He couldn’t stand me as I was.” This might be the central anthem of entitled dominion’s objects. Misplace his wallet, forget a word, arrive late for dinner, and my patient now will slam his head against a wall, bash his face with his fist, and scream at himself repeatedly, “You idiot, you idiot.” As long as he’s an “idiot,” the world as mapped is a properly ordered one. Interfere with this self-directed violence, though, as the analysis occasionally does, and the patient is left feeling simultaneously homicidal and insane. The map, then, is calming, despite its devastating cost.

THE MAP’S WORKINGS IN THE WORLD AND IN THE CONSULTING ROOM

First, to sense the map’s working in the world, listen to Lawrence Summers, former president of Harvard, former Secretary of the Treasury, writing here in a confidential World Bank memo from 1991: “I think the economic logic behind dumping a load of toxic waste in the lowest-wage country is impeccable and we should face up to that. . . . I’ve always thought that countries in Africa are vastly under-polluted, their air quality is probably vastly inefficiently low compared to Los Angeles. . . . Just between you and me, shouldn’t the World Bank be encouraging more migration of the dirty industries to the Least Developed Countries?” (Nixon, p. 1).

Though we all might identify with the superficial and manifest logic of Whiteness here—number and equivalence, fairness and justice—we will refuse and resist both its explicit epistemology of entitled dominion and its covert and foundational logic of mapping. This mapping logic puts Summers—anxious, disenchanted, swaggering—on one side of a partition, the world as some combination of dump and zoo on the other. Summers is mapping reality by organizing it hierarchically. He is imagining the planet as conceived by an epistemology of entitled dominion, dividing a once single

and unified sphere into two: Whiteness, clean and whole, here; its least developed objects there, far away, near the “shithole.”

Summers exemplifies the map’s workings in the material world. The following clinical examples represent the map’s workings at the psycho-analytic edge, the plane formed by the intersection of psychic and material realities.

CLINICAL WORK

In the anecdotes that follow, I mean to illustrate some of the map’s workings as they emerge in two very different clinical situations. The first may exemplify a kind of remission; the other may point toward an effective method of treatment.

Case I

Mr. A. has been told that he is one of two finalists for a position he applied for, out of an initial pool of four hundred applicants. Mr. A., having undergone three extensive interviews, has been told that he will be informed of a decision after the weekend. This, the first session of the week, takes place on Tuesday.

They still haven’t called me. It’s such bullshit. Those imbeciles. It’s not as though they are interviewing me for the Supreme Court. This is one level from the bottom. It’s disgusting. The guy says he’ll call on Monday. And then, to add to the humiliation, my answering service fails on just that day. I have to call the fucking secretary and ask her if perhaps her toad of a boss has found the time and the inclination to have called me. Sorry to bother her but my answering machine isn’t working—the lamest excuse in the book. I have to stoop to that; even if it’s true in this case, they have no reason to believe me. To them, I’m groveling for their piece-of-shit job. It’s outrageous. And still he hasn’t called. He then calls me and says by today, he promises, by noon, and now it’s after that and he still hasn’t called. And all I can do is wait. I hate it. I hate them.

But, at a meeting just now, I almost lost it. I’m still worried about touching these people. I know you can’t get HIV by touching, but still—small cuts, fingernails, there’s always a chance. And these people are coughing, hacking things up, they’re sick, and I don’t want them touching me. And at the end of the meeting, this guy comes in late, very late, like he always does. He comes just to show up. He’s not a real scientist. He’s a fraud. Filthy, fucking n-word comes in and fakes his way into my meeting. Dirty, sick, lying n-word. And I’m there in the same place, maybe having to touch his hand. It’s outrageous.

Mr. A.'s entire orientation to the world is vertical. I can practically feel the sweat pouring out of him as he desperately tries to hold on to his place on his subject/object world's sheer vertical wall. The racial epithet bluntly marks and maps that sheer verticality. It establishes a bottom, a floor, below which, under no circumstances, might Mr. A. follow. Mr. A. can fall only so far, can lose only so much, can be only so out of control. Mr. A. maps the pejorative object beyond his limits; this object houses everything that Mr. A. cannot bear to house. Listen to the intimacy, the certainty in his voice—the absolute conviction that he knows, beyond any doubt, the essential and particular characteristics of everyone on the map. Mr. A. does no work; the map does it all. Verticality is omniscient—no questions, only answers.

Mr. A. had sought me out because he had heard I was “the real thing.” For some time I could work with him, more or less effectively, by leaning on his idealization, by putting the vertical map to what I thought might be a benign use. I was at a loss, though, as to how his reliance on the map might be disturbed. A violent incarcerated father, an ineffectual mother with whom he had almost no contact, a steady use of cocaine, weekends punctuated by physical altercations—he said seeing me helped him “stay cool” and “out of trouble.” The only intense emotion he expressed was rage, with attendant regret that he hadn’t “killed” the offending party. Two years into the analysis, he bought a tiny dog toward whom he seemed to feel intensely loving and protective. He became preoccupied with the dog, and less so with any of his demeaned objects. Then a woman entered the picture. She moved in, and suddenly it was the three of them, trying to set up a household. Nothing about him seemed to really change except his preoccupations. He wanted to “be good,” occasionally saying, without much conviction, to “be like you.” But with these manifest aspirational changes, he was no longer sounding anything like he had. He was busy with the woman and the dog, wanting to be good to both of them. He now needed money and therefore a job. The work he found was not particularly elevated, and yet he put up with it. After a while, living what seemed to him a mediocre but decent life, he ended his analysis.

The whole treatment was a strange experience for me. I felt I hadn’t done much except to put up with him, to neither join in with nor aim to end his Whiteness-fueled pejorative epithets, and his reliance on his steep vertical mapping. And yet, comparing how he was to how he became, I came to think that his time in analysis had been a success, that it had

somehow turned out to at least resemble “the real thing.” The vertical planes of his life had been added to, pushed aside for now, by his affections for the woman and the dog and maybe by his wish to become like me, whatever that may have meant. Horizontal planes had emerged in the midst of the vertical ones. Not a cure, certainly, but a valuable remission, generating a zone of possibility. I remain almost certain, though, that, given even slight provocation, Parasitical Whiteness will recur; Mr. A. will resume his racist rants, his violently imagined solutions.

Case 2

A woman in analysis is speaking of her growing disgust at her male partner. She can barely tolerate his neediness, his insistence that they always be together. Increasingly restless and sexually unsatisfied, she has begun to threaten either affairs or a breakup. Her partner responds forcefully and repeatedly, with an image that has long been a presence in their relationship. He says to her: “This is not you speaking. I know you love me. It’s the pink monkey you have inside you. That’s what’s talking. That monkey is crazy, wild. You can’t control it. You need me to keep it under control.” The patient has a history of profound psychiatric disturbance; the idea of losing control terrifies her. For years, terrified, she has joined with her partner in working to keep the “pink monkey” under control. The “pink monkey”—a dangerous animal, demeaned by color—names what she and her controlling partner agree is an invasive humanoid presence, the incarnation of a mad dysregulating primitivity, located not outside where it belongs, but instead deep in her interior.

Long compliant, certain that he alone can keep her from falling apart, she stays with him and grows increasingly unhappy. At a crisis point in the relationship, she has a dream:

I am with some people in a sexual situation. Not sure of anything. Who they are, what they want. One is a boy, or a woman. I can’t tell. Then it’s a woman, but she has a penis. It’s a little boy’s penis. I’m excited. Then it’s a woman again. And I look at myself. Not sure what I have, what I am. A boy, a woman, whether I have a penis. I’m excited. Everything about it is exciting. Scary.

She begins speaking about the dream hesitantly, afraid it means she is becoming crazy again, perverse and sick. I say she seems to expect me to confirm that. “Isn’t that what psychoanalysts do?” she says. “Raul says I’m crazy and you don’t? Aren’t you a cop too?” She begins to laugh. “If

that dream isn't sick, then what is it?" she asks. Laughing more, she exclaims, "It's the pink monkey! That's what it is. The pink monkey is a sex monster. Every possible part. Penis. Boy. Woman. Me. Not so bad. Really, not so bad. Really kind of cute. Don't you think so?"

Her initial exuberance at finding herself happily aligned with an image that had long seemed an alien threat fades in the sessions immediately following. "I feel giddy, like a drunk. How can I trust this? How can I trust you? It's not knowing who to trust, what to trust, not knowing what's real—this is what being crazy felt like." I say that she might feel that I had aligned myself with the pink monkey, had enticed her into sacrificing her partner's insistence on sane regulation in exchange for joining me in unlimited excess. This picture of me as a malign seducer reminds her of the Robert De Niro character in *Cape Fear*, a killer who entices an adolescent girl in order to gain vengeful access to her father, the policeman responsible for the killer's imprisonment.

These exchanges took place five years into the analysis. Those five years seem to carry weight as the patient contends with what she feels were "two men, each of you out to get me on your side." I tell her I think she is at least partially right about me—I do want her to come over to "my side"; I think the image of the pink monkey is being used to frighten and restrict her, and that her fear of it is by now anachronistic and that, having developed her own capacities for control, the pink monkey is gratuitous and serves her partner's interests more than hers. She tells me she had come to trust me over the years: "Without that, I don't think I could believe you now."

Once she found her way out of the relationship with Raul she met a man who she told me is "not afraid" of what she wants. "No more pink monkey," she says, "just me, maybe pink, maybe a monkey."

Countering the epistemology of entitled dominion, our work here was informed by what seems to me an *epistemology of identificatory obligation*. Instead of aiming to segregate and dominate the potentially disruptive image of the pink monkey, the patient found a way to identify with it, to take it into herself, in an act that she herself called "kind"—"we are the same flesh, the pink monkey and me," she said. With this, she reconfigured the strange as the curious, turned the threat of disorganization into the promise of surprise. Identificatory obligation promises the possibility of permanent erotic contact—ever possible and ever uncertain—that entitlement and dominion had moralistically forsworn.

The pink monkey had been transformed. The patient and Raul, via a shared, and perverse, epistemology of entitled dominion had relegated the patient's desires to the status of a mad animal in need of a cage, mapping her as a kind of domesticated zoo animal, dangerous without her trainer. Putting her dream to excellent use, the patient found a way to liberate the monkey, turning it into a blurred flurry of sexual parts, polymorphous, yes, but no longer frightening—instead a “cute” whirr of desire. She was now enchanted by, and identifying with, what once had frightened her. In effect, in the dream the monkey speaks, essentially seducing her, winning her over, showing his “cuteness,” making it clear that he need not be locked up, kept on a chain, suppressed.

The voice of Perversion had banished the woman and her primitive pink monkey to a psychic version of the walled-off faraway territory. Her partner's control was a nonnegotiable condition of her release. A shared fear of the pink monkey's unruly desires bound this perverse couple. Those desires marked a threat to order. Entitled dominion here camouflaged itself as benevolent protection against the recurrence of psychic breakdown, which had long ago disfigured her, just as it was the voice of order and protection that had marked and mapped my friend Bobby as disfigured.

But here, first the dream, and then the patient's work on the dream, counter the perverse partner's epistemology of entitled dominion. The patient, trying to figure out what she can actually claim to know, joins her analyst in an epistemology grounded in uncertain, tentative, experimental interpretation. The work of coming to know takes place right on the borderline. Patient and monkey speak to each other. Both begin in states of false erudition, internal representatives of the false vertical dichotomy, defining civilization here and the pink monkey—barbarism—there. The patient, though, is not actually civilized, the monkey not actually barbaric. Both terms are, in fact, entirely imaginary. Any identificatory epistemology engenders the possibility of a linking encounter across this imaginary divide. Enchantment is merely one means of eroding vertical disidentification. There are many others. Identification—looking for and finding likeness—this is the central clinical, and social, move that eradicates verticality and turns fixed hierarchy into mobile difference.

This kind of clinical work, dismantling perverse structures organized around an epistemology of entitled dominion, turns interior vertical maps into interior horizontal ones. As such, this work eliminates at least one psychic receptor site for Parasitic Whiteness. Replace repulsion by desire

and fear by delight, and a portion of the once perverse map turns horizontal—the once reviled monkey now dazzles, now an icon of vital possibility instead of devitalized excess. And with that transformation, Parasitic Whiteness loses some access to a now less susceptible host.

Epistemologies of identificatory obligation aim to reverse Freud's famous axiom and to arrive, finally, at this: Where ego alone once was, there id too must also be.

Psychoanalytic work, then, need not properly target Whiteness itself here. Instead, it can effectively target the psychic receptor sites that provide Whiteness the interior vertical mapping on which it depends. The vertical map disrupts the identificatory bond that might once have bound subject to object. The bond persists, though, reshaped and hardened now into a vertical format. Identification morphs into disidentification, similarity into difference, affectionate care into sadistic cruelty. Diminish the spread and influence of these interior vertical receptor sites and, indirectly, the parasite of Whiteness is dislodged, loosed, itself becoming susceptible to exposure, as a differentiated and alien presence. Psychoanalytic work, in its most radical, fundamental, and, finally neutral forms, targets any and all of the effects of vertical mapping. Where verticality was, there horizontality will be.

CONCLUDING NOTE

Where to stand? On what stable platform? To turn Whiteness into an object for thought one must first look for a point of stillness. This point actually does not exist. After all, Whiteness, in its mature form, generates a volatile totality from which there is no clear exit, no clear escape. To pursue that exit, to hope for even temporary escape—of getting outside and looking back, of seeing where you seem to have been—depends, I think, on a kind of conceptual mobility, a willingness to use metaphors and similes for only as long as they serve, and then to move on. For me, here, the most important of those metaphors have been “parasite,” “mapping,” and “verticality.” Each seemed to me both stable and elastic, capable of simultaneously supporting thought and providing a jumping-off point whenever that support felt exhausted. And, of course, psychoanalysis provides something other than similes and metaphors. It provides a reliable theoretical/technical structure, one we can count on, one that, in spite of its limitations, will hold up—has held up—as we all try to achieve the

requisite conceptual, emotional, and personal nimbleness to grapple with the Whiteness that, whoever we are, infiltrates our interior and exterior surround.

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